

PREFACE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Littoral series of conferences are unique in the sense that they bring together scientists, stakeholders and policy makers. As Minister of North Sea in Belgium, I am honored to host the Littoral Conference 2012 in Ostend. Only a decade ago, many people considered that the North Sea policy was of less political importance. I was convinced that marine and maritime policy was of increasing importance and today it is indeed an essential policy. The shipping lanes, together with port activities are dramatically intensified in use. Infrastructures at the seaside, but also in front of the coast and further off shore are being built. Offshore energy production is becoming an intrinsic part of our renewable energy provision. Shipping lanes need to be dredged. Tourism at the coast and at sea is increasing and in the middle of all activities, biological productivity and provision of fish remains of course highly valuable.

Human presence at the coast and at sea affects also species and habitats in a negative or sometimes positive way. Nature conservation at sea becomes therefore an integral part of all economic activities and further policy development. The current conference offers an excellent forum to bring knowledge on potential conflicts and opportunities together. The highlights of this Littoral edition are therefore very well chosen: measuring sustainability, coastal productivity, innovations in coastal infrastructure and coastal nature conservation. The coasts, together with the adjacent marine waters, will continue gaining importance in the future. We have the chance to balance the opportunities in economic development, social welfare and biological conservation of this land-sea interface. The tools we have at hand are integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and increasingly also marine spatial planning (MSP), as we are moving more and more to coastal and off shore waters. Double and triple use of several marine areas is possible in a sustainable way; reaching the good environmental status as defined in our marine strategies should be our point of reference. Experiments to test the limits of what is possible now and in the future are needed, both for multiple economic use as for combined ecological measures with specific economic activities. Real marine and coastal protected areas should also find their way in ICZM and MSP. The open system of the sea is interesting to further develop human activities but it confronts policy makers also with a huge challenge: how to manage an area that is so connected to what happens outside? As Belgian Minister of North Sea, responsible for 0.5% of the North Sea, I am convinced that both ICZM and even more so MSP must be developed with international collaboration. I believe that Littoral 2012 is a good opportunity to bring together the insights and knowledge to come to a sustainable use of our seas. The time is now.

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Honorary chair of the Scientific Committee of Littoral 2012